



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Ouachita National Forest
Caddo-Womble Ranger District

1523 Highway 270 East
Mount Ida, AR 71957
870-867-2101
Fax: 870-867-3338

File Code: 1950; 2400; 1560
Date: January 31, 2020

Dear Interested Party:

This project announcement letter serves to initiate scoping, “an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed” (40 CFR 1501.7). I request your input on the following proposed action regarding the Walnut Project.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to implement the following management activities*:

- Seed tree regeneration harvest – 117 acres
- Seed tree connected actions – 117 acres:
 - Prescribed burn/chemical/mechanical/manual site preparation for natural regeneration
 - Chop/rip site preparation for artificial regeneration (if needed)
 - Hand plant shortleaf pine seedlings (if needed)
 - Timber stand improvement – release (chemical/manual)
 - Timber stand improvement – precommercial thinning
- Commercial thinning – 2,357 acres
- Commercial thinning (plantation) – 367 acres
- Commercial thinning (woodland development) – 3,292 acres
- Wildlife stand improvement (midstory removal) – 119 acres
- Pond maintenance – 13 each
- Glade restoration – 5 acres
- Nest boxes – 56 each
- Fuel reduction/ecosystem prescribed burn – 22,264 acres
- Fire line construction – 19 miles
- Fire line reconstruction – 22 miles
- System road reconstruction – 29 miles
- Temporary road construction – 32 miles
- System road decommission – 2 miles
- Water and electric service installed in Charlton Campground – Loop A
- Expansion of Hickory Nut Campground
- Construction of Visitor Information Center(VIC) at Lake Ouachita Vista
- Re-paving the parking lot at Lake Ouachita Vista
- Construction of Power and Water Utility Lines to the VIC and Hickory Nut Campground
- Watershed improvement – 1 mile
- Non-native invasive plant species control – 1 acre

*All quantities are approximate; treatment acres would be less due to avoided slopes and/or streamside management areas.



The project area is located around the community of Crystal Springs, Arkansas in Garland County in T2S R22&23W and T3S R22&23W. The 26,142-acre project area contains 16,275 acres of National Forest System lands. Proposed actions would occur in Management Areas (MAs) 14 and 16.

Purpose of the Action

Overall guidance for this action is found in the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ouachita National Forest (Revised Forest Plan). The primary goal of the Revised Forest Plan is to promote diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable ecosystems. The purpose of this action is to promote the health and vigor of the project area by providing for a diversity of plant and animal communities, creating early seral habitat, reducing fuel accumulation, and producing a sustainable yield of wood products.

Need for the Action

- Past fire suppression activities have removed the natural role of fire from the landscape. This absence of fire has resulted in excessive fuel accumulations, increasing the risk of damage to resources in the event of wildfire.
- Fire is a natural ecosystem process needed to reduce density of understory woody species and maintain the needed light environment that promotes the growth of wildlife foods, the natural regeneration of pine and oak, and the conditions for plants adapted to fire.
- Pine and hardwood stands contain damaged, poorly formed, and diseased trees. The trees are overcrowded or densely stocked, reducing growth and crown development. These conditions result in stress and reduced vigor and health, thus increasing susceptibility to insects and disease.
- There is limited access to those stands in need of silvicultural treatment, resulting in the need for new road construction. Some existing roads are not useable and create the need for road re-construction to access timber.
- There is a lack of high quality forage and a lack of nesting habitat for species requiring early successional habitat.
- There are known populations of exotic and invasive plant species, and possibly hogs, throughout the project area resulting in the need for Non-native Invasive Species control and habitat protection.
- The project includes several recreation sites, trails and areas identified as high scenic integrity. Recreation opportunities and scenic values need to be maintained within these areas.
- There are known locations of glades throughout the project area that are in need of being restored and protected.

Invitation to Participate in Project Planning

Scoping is not limited to a single point in time; we will continue to accept and consider comments until an implementation decision is made. With that said, your comments will be most helpful if they are received early in the process. They will help us identify environmental issues associated with implementation, and alternative ways to meet Forest plan objectives and desired conditions. Your involvement will enable us to better assess concerns of the public.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become a part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted

anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Objection Process

This project is subject to subparts A and B of *36 CFR Part 218 Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process* (objection process); it is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA).

The designated opportunity for public comment in response to this solicitation is **January 31, 2020** to **March 2, 2020**. Providing specific written comments during this time will afford you standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire (see Upcoming Project Planning Steps).

Pursuant to §218.2, specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

How to Comment

Specific written comments must be submitted to: Shalonda Guy, District Ranger, 1523 Hwy 270 E, Mt. Ida AR 71957 or fax to 870-867-3338. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Send electronic comments, in a common digital format, to comments-southern-ouachita-caddo-womble@fs.fed.us. Please state "Walnut Project" in the email subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Upcoming Project Planning Steps

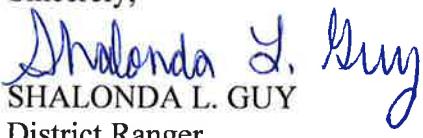
As stated above, your comments will help us identify issues and they will be used to formulate alternatives to this proposal. An environmental analysis will be conducted and the results will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA).

Upon completion, the EA will be released for public review and comment. A 30-day notice and comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 218 will be initiated. This comment period will afford you another opportunity to obtain standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire.

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

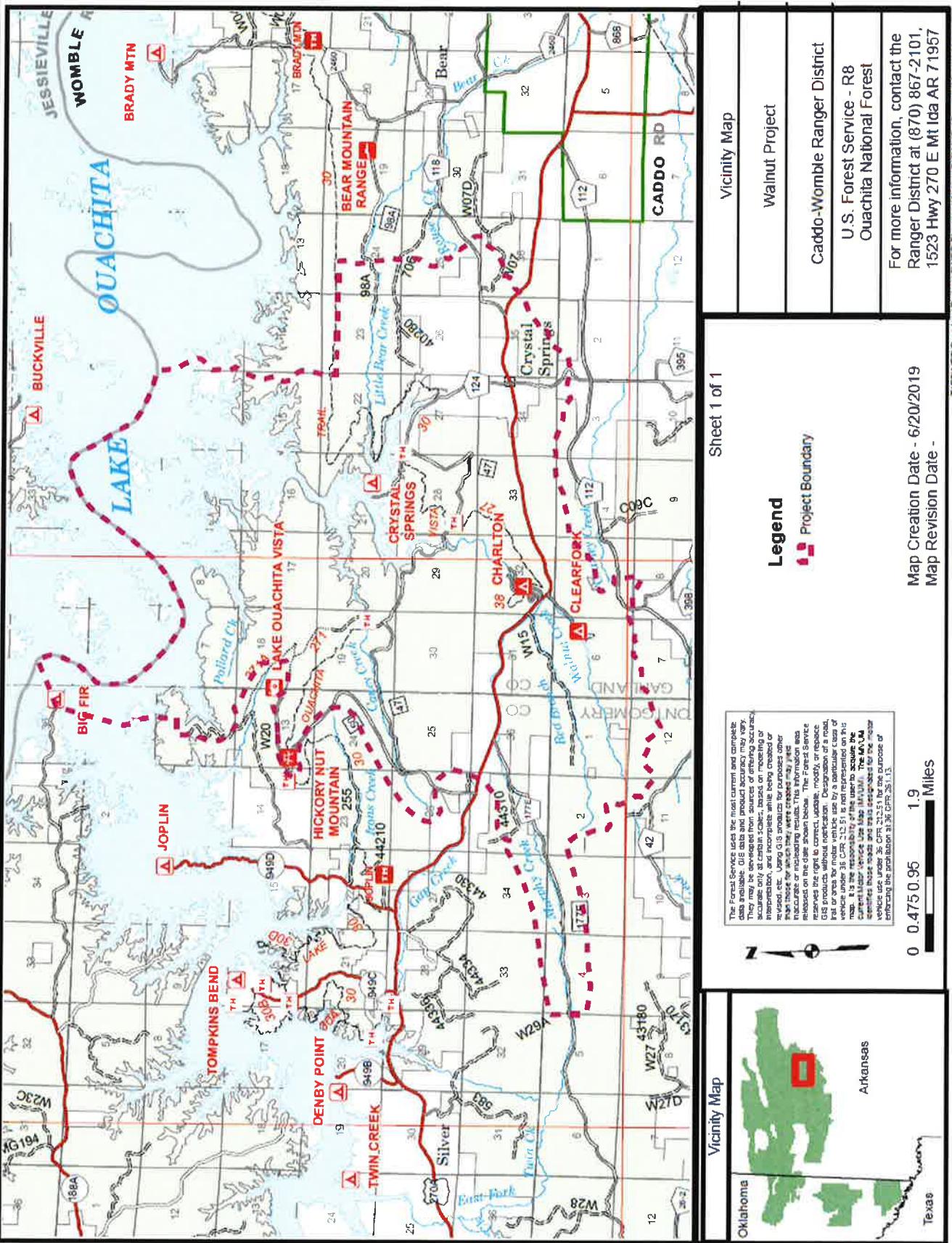
If you have questions about this project or would like more information, please contact Chip Stokes at 870-867-2101 or chip.stokes@usda.gov.

Sincerely,


SHALONDA L. GUY

District Ranger

Enclosures



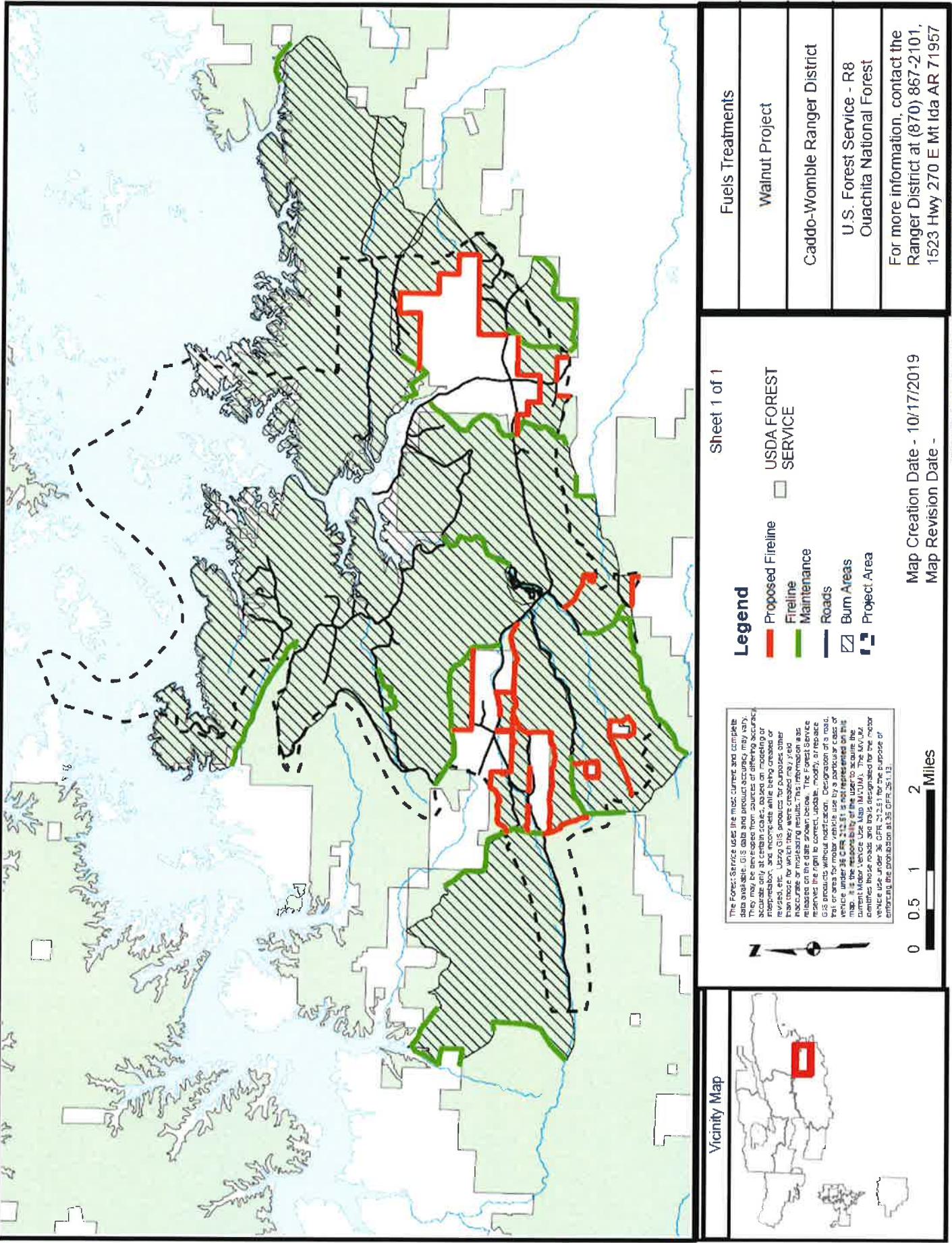
Caring for the Land and Serving People

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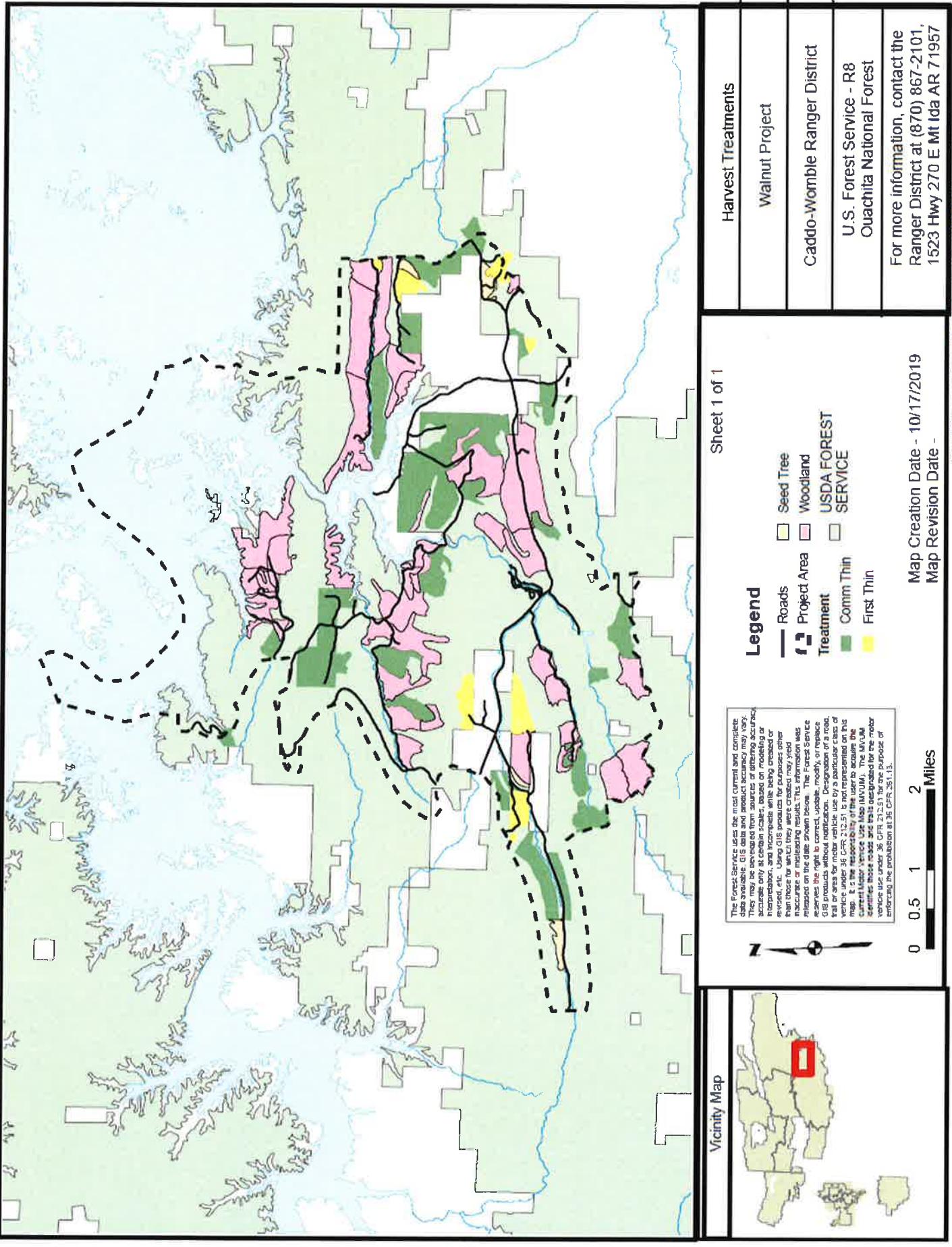
Environ Biol Fish (2009) 86:169–176



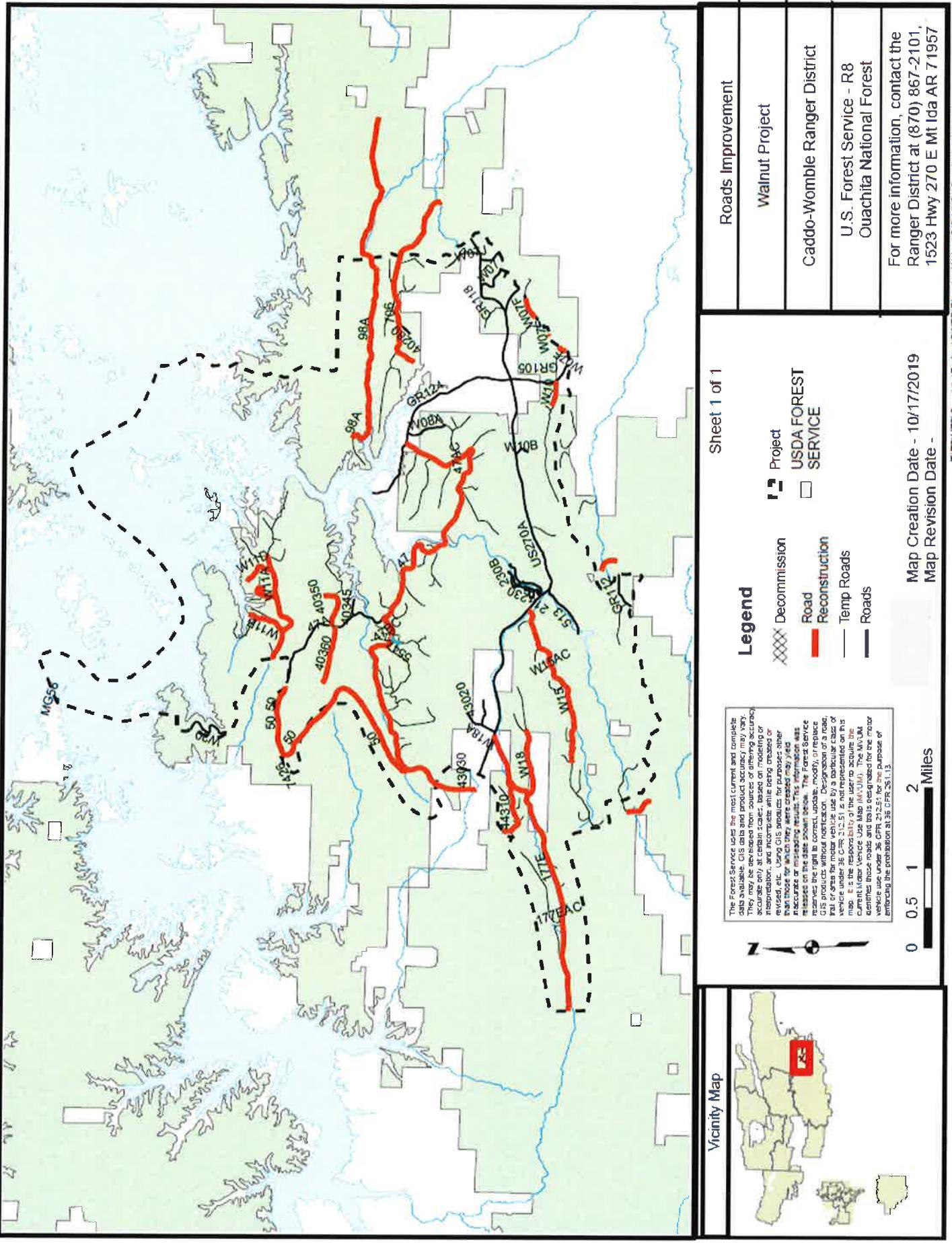
Walnut Project



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